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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 000158

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DEPT. FOR EUR/SE AND NEA/I

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [TU](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: CLOSING MAKHMOUR REFUGEE CAMP: HOW REALISTIC A  
SHORT-TERM GOAL?

REF: BAGHDAD 167

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Classified By: Ambassador Ross Wilson for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Efforts to re-energize negotiations to close Makhmour refugee camp in northern Iraq will continue to be hindered by GOT and UNHCR security concerns related to the camp. Working level GOT officials believe radical PKK elements continue to control the camp. They believe a permanent UNHCR presence and a viable, trusted security force are needed to provide an effective cordon around the camp. Both could help ensure such elements remain unable to intimidate and unduly influence camp residents. Yet camp residents have been there so long that most are likely well indoctrinated. UNHCR-Ankara officials admit the lack of permanent UNHCR staff at Makhmour makes monitoring camp life impossible. Both MFA and UNHCR indicate that a Coalition force security presence/control over the camp could make the difference in breaking this long-standing stalemate. We should consider what additional forces might be made available as part of a clear and agreed strategy to close Makhmour. END SUMMARY

GOT Not Ready to Resume Talks on Makhmour Under Current Conditions  
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¶2. (C) The GOT has not seen a change in the degree to which the PKK exercises control over Makhmour refugee camp since negotiations on camp closure broke off in April 2007, MFA Security Affairs Department Head Ceren Etiz told us January 25. Noting she had discussed the issue with lead GOT negotiator DG for Security Affairs Amb. Hayati Guven just before meeting with us, Etiz emphasized the GOT's underlying concern regarding the ability of Makhmour residents to make a choice regarding their future free of PKK intimidation and influence. It is not enough to describe the camp as "civilian in nature" because a (January 2007) search for weapons turned up nothing. The question is whether a group

of known radical, hard-core PKK members will continue to be allowed to exercise control over the camp and its inhabitants.

13. (C) Etiz questioned whether most Makhmour residents would want to return since those who wished to leave in years past had done so. She argued that some Makhmour residents who had spoken out against the PKK in years past had been cast out of the camp. UNHCR has never provided the GOT detailed information from previous camp censuses so Etiz said the GOT does not have a comprehensive list of residents. Turkish officials know from intelligence sources and open-source reports that a number of hard-core PKK members remain in the camp, some in leadership positions. Given the lack of information, Etiz said the GOT does not know how many might want to return but wants to ensure that when residents are given a choice, they have the ability to make the decision freely. She noted, for example, that residents with sons fighting with the main force of the PKK at Kandil Mountain or in other camps near the Turkey-Iraq border may be told by the PKK who control the camp that they must remain if their sons are to remain safe. It is in the PKK's interest to keep a massive camp of ethnic Kurdish refugees open, both as a recruiting ground and as a tool to help prop up the cause of Kurdish nationalism.

14. (C) Etiz claimed the camp's mayor, Abdulkerim Tunc, is a known PKK member who has been quoted as saying, "We do not want to go back to Turkey unless we can return as what we are" (i.e., PKK members). Etiz said the GOT has previously indicated its willingness to provide information to those who wish to return regarding any outstanding arrest warrants. A problem arises, however, if previously unknown information about residents' activities at Makhmour comes to light as they return to Turkey. In such cases, prosecutors could open cases against some individuals. Such individuals could avail

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themselves of Turkey's existing repentance law provided they were not involved in violence. Most camp residents may not be aware of that law, given the degree to which the PKK controls communication to its members and followers, according to Etiz.

15. (C) Any decision on Makhmour will be of a political nature and require the attention of the highest levels of the GOT. But, Etiz noted, some bureaucrat will have to sign the tripartite agreement and additional protocol related to the camp closure. That person will be taking responsibility for the residents who may choose to return. GOT security agencies will want to carefully screen returnees to ensure the next suicide bomber is not among them. While no one can ever guarantee that, GOT officials believe a permanent UNHCR presence and a beefed-up, viable security cordon around the camp may provide them the necessary confidence that hard-core PKK members are removed from the camp's population.

16. (C) Etiz said the GOT would be willing to move ahead with talks if it were clear the security plan agreed upon years ago was being implemented. That, in the GOT's view, has not happened. In 2003, the implication that Coalition forces would provide security was the basis for this agreement, according to Etiz. Events in Iraq had precluded that. However, if the security situation in Iraq has changed appreciably to allow an effective presence of MNF-I troops, as well as the permanent presence of UNHCR staff, perhaps the equation will change. Failing that, GOT officials do not currently have confidence that ISF-hatted Peshmerga provide sufficient security to enable the Turks to re-engage on the issue. She gave several examples of cases in which Peshmerga had in recent months given in to camp resident demands to loosen control of access to the camp. Finally, according to Etiz, the impact of the closure of Makhmour on the larger struggle against PKK terrorism is not big enough to make it a top GOT priority in that struggle.

UNHCR -- Willing to Consider Talks

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17. (C) UNHCR Acting Country Representative Roland Schilling and Senior Protection Officer Eduardo Yrezabal told us January 25 they had had no discussions or substantive contact with GOT officials on Makhmour since the April 2007 Geneva meeting. At that time, all sides agreed the differences were unlikely to be bridged. Schilling and Yrezabal agreed the political situation had changed substantially in Turkey with the July 2007 elections and military action by Turkish forces against the PKK. As a result, it might be useful to ask UNHCR headquarters in Geneva about resuming talks. Schilling noted the principal stumbling block remains GOT concerns regarding security at the camp. Yrezabal said UNHCR officials in Iraq claim GOI-provided security is having some impact on camp access. However, discovering the true nature of PKK control over camp residents would require a permanent UNHCR presence which current security conditions in Iraq make difficult. Currently, UNHCR officials visit the camp monthly, but given the logistical difficulty of arranging such visits, any element of surprise is lost. This created a de factor power vacuum which camp leadership filled. Schilling noted UNHCR generally is more willing to place its employees in dangerous situations but would likely have to battle the UN's security bureaucrats to move a permanent presence into Makhmour. Were Coalition forces able to provide security, it might be easier for UNHCR to make a case for permanent staffing.

18. (C) Regarding reports of 22 new families arriving from Turkey and receiving permission to settle in the camp, Schilling expressed surprise and said he was unaware. Since only GOI authorities can make a determination to offer refugee status to such individuals, he was curious how their status was determined. Yrezabal promised to follow-up with

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UNHCR local staff in Erbil. Schilling agreed that fresh movement of ethnic Kurdish citizens of Turkey into Makhmour could complicate efforts to convince current residents of improved conditions inside Turkey as a reason to return.

19. (C) COMMENT: As we engage with GOT leaders and urge them to make continued progress on non-kinetic actions to counter the PKK, it will be helpful to know whether we are able to provide the security support envisioned by some here.

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